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REASONS

B Y *K*

Mr. EBENEZER ERSKINE Minister at *Stirling*,

Mr. WILLIAM WILSON Minister at *Perth*,

Mr. ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF Minister at *Abernethy*, and

Mr. JAMES FISHER Minister at *Kinclaven*,

Why they have not

ACCEDED to the Judicatories

OF THE

Establish'd CHURCH.

Published by the foresaid Ministers.

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TO CHURCH

OF THE

Established Church

Printed by the Rev. J. W. ...

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in the ...



REASONS by Mr. *Ebenezer Erskine* Minister at *Stirling*, Mr. *William Wilson* Minister at *Perth*, Mr. *Alexander Moncrieff* Minister at *Abernethy*, and Mr. *James Fisher* Minister at *Kinclaven*, why they have not acceded to the Judicatories of the established Church.

THE late General Assembly having by their Act, *May 14th 1734*, impowered the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling*, under such Limitations as are mentioned in the said Act, to restore Mr. *Ebenezer Erskine* Minister at *Stirling*, Mr. *William Wilson* Minister at *Perth*, Mr. *Alexander Moncrieff* Minister at *Abernethy*, and Mr. *James Fisher* Minister at *Kinclaven*, to their respective Ministerial Charges: And the Synod, which met at *Stirling*, *July 2d*, clothed with this delegated Power, having, in Consequence of the Assembly's Act, taken off the Sentences pronounced by the Commission of the General Assembly 1733 against the foresaid four Brethren; it has therefore been the Opinion of severals, both Ministers and private Christians, That the said four Brethren should have instantly acceded to the Judicatories of the established Church, in regard it is judged that the Grounds of their Secession were removed by the Conduct of the last Assembly, and that a Door was opened for their Return to the Judicatories, by the Act of the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling* in their Favours: And, since they have not taken the Benefit of the said Act, there is no doubt but their

Conduct has been censured by many of their Friends, as well as by these who have more keenly appeared against them.

In order therefore to satisfy such who have the same Cause and Interest with themselves at Heart, and to remove the Exceptions of others, who are either more easily imposed upon by Reason of their Ignorance of the present Situation of Affairs, or who thro' Prejudice may entertain harsh and unfavourable Thoughts of their Conduct, they thought it their Duty to make publick at this Juncture, the *Reasons* why they have not as yet had Freedom to re-enter the Judicatories of the established Church at the Door which is opened by the Act of the last Assembly, and the Proceedings of the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling* thereupon.

That we may more distinctly and clearly lay open our present Case, we are laid under a Necessity of enquiring into the Procedure of the last Assembly, who are supposed to have made some considerable Steps towards a Reformation of the Evils formerly complained of, and for removing of the Grounds upon which our *Secession* from the Judicatories was laid: And as that Assembly was composed of a Body of Reverend and Honourable Members, many of them of a considerable Standing in the Ministry, and whom we regard as faithful Labourers in the Lord's Vineyard; so it was Matter of Joy and Refreshment, not only to us, but to many others thro' the Land, that a Stop was put to the unwarrantable and violent Proceedings of some former Assemblies and their Commissions; and if the Difficulties that ly in the Way of our Accession to the Judicatories of the Church are not removed, we do not impute it to the Intentions and Inclinations of many of the worthy Members of the last Assembly, but to the Opposition they met with from some who had an active Hand in carrying on, or concurring with, the former Course of Defection. But in regard it is not the *Intentions* and *Inclinations* of Men that will be the Evidence of the Re-
for-

formation of a Church, but their *publick Deeds* and *Records*, these being the only authentick Documents that can be transmitted to Posterity of her Fidelity and Loyalty to the Lord Christ her only Head and Lawgiver, particularly in a Day of Trouble, Backsliding and treading down; therefore it is with Regrete that we must observe the close *Connection* that there is betwixt the Acts of the last Assembly, and some Acts and Proceedings of the Assembly 1733 and their Commission, upon which our *Secession* was principally laid, and which appear to us to be destructive of the Rights and Privileges of the Members of this Church, and to reflect Dishonour upon her glorious Head and King. We do not hereby intend to weaken the Hands of our Brethren who are endeavouring a Reformation, but to lay open before them the *Difficulties* that yet remain with us, or the *Reasons* of our declining hitherto to join in Ministerial Communion with the Judicatories of the established Church; and this we shall do, after we have briefly narrated the Manner how we came into that Situation wherein adorable Providence has placed us.

It is beyond all Dispute, that Mr. *Erskine* was censured first by the Synod, and then by the General Assembly, for impugning some Acts of Assembly and Proceedings of Church-judicatories, in his Sermon at the Opening of the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling*, as the Act and Sentence of the Assembly 1733 in that Matter expressly bears; and we have likewise made it evident, in some former Prints which we have emitted, that the Censure past against Mr. *Erskine* was founded on his testifying against the Act of Assembly 1732, and the violent Intrusions that were made upon Christian Congregations by the Church-judicatories at that Time; and therefore we judged it our Duty to enter a *Protestation* against that Decision of the Assembly 1733, as a manifest Restraint of our Ministerial Freedom and Faithfulness, and plainly inhibiting, not only Mr. *Erskine*, but also all other Ministers of this Church, to testify against the arbitrary

trary Proceedings of Church-judicatories, and the growing Defections of the Day. This Protestation was so highly resented by that Assembly, that they ordered their Commission to *suspend*, and to proceed to higher Censure against us, in case we should not profess our Sorrow for offering the said Protestation to the Assembly, and retract the same; which Sentences were rigidly execute by the Commission who first suspended, and then loosed our Relation to our respective Parishes, and declared us no longer Ministers of this Church, &c. as their Sentence itself (formerly printed) more fully bears. When therefore Matters were come to such a Pass, that we were excluded from keeping up a proper Testimony against the Defections and Backslidings of the then prevailing Party, in a Way of Ministerial Communion with them; we judged it our necessary Duty, for this and other Reasons (published in our *Testimony*) to make a *Secession* from the Judicatories of the established Church. And since the Lord in his adorable Providence permitted the Judicatories to thrust us out, at a Time when a Course of Defection was carried on with a high Hand, it will be therefore necessary for the Vindication of our present Conduct, to enquire if the Assembly 1734 have at least so far removed the Grounds of our *Secession*, that we may, in a Consistency with the *Testimony* we have committed, *accede* unto the Judicatories of the Church, and join in Ministerial Communion with them.

The Grounds of our *seceding* from the then prevailing Party (as published and enlarged upon in our *Testimony*) were chiefly these;

“ 1. That the prevailing Party at that Time in the Judicatories of the Church, did *break down* the Fences and Guards, which former General Assemblies had wisely *set up*, against Innovations in the Doctrine, Worship, Government and Discipline of this Church.

“ 2. That they exercised a *legislative Power* and Authority over the House of God, in Opposition to the

the Laws and Ordinances of the great Lord and Master of the House ; and, in Consequence thereof, usurped a Lordly and Magisterial Dominion over the Flock and Heritage of God.

“ 3. That they pursued such Measures as did actually corrupt, or at least had a direct Tendency to corrupt, the Doctrine contain'd in our excellent *Confession of Faith*.

“ 4. That they *restrained Ministerial Freedom* and Faithfulness in testifying against the Defections and Backslidings of the Times ; and therefore, being excluded from keeping up a standing Testimony, in a Way of Ministerial Communion, against these sinful and Church-ruining Evils, we found it our necessary Duty to make a Secession from the prevailing Party at that Time, and consequently from the Judicatories of the Church, till they should see the Sins they are guilty of, and the Mistakes they are under, and reform and amend the same.”

These were the general Grounds upon which we did make a *Secession* from the Judicatories, by the *Protestation* we entred against the Commission that met in November 1733, who did thrust us out from Ministerial Communion with them ; and, as we have enlarged these Reasons of our Secession in our *Testimony*, so we shall not make any further Repetition of what we have there said, but what we judge necessary for clearing and illustrating the Subject we are upon : Neither shall we now stay to prove, that the above general Heads, as they are more fully and more particularly insisted upon in our *Testimony*, were sufficient to warrant our Secession ; for this also, we must refer the impartial Reader to the same Paper. Our present Enquiry is, If the last General Assembly 1734 have so far removed the above-mentioned Grounds, and reformed the Evils we complain of in them, that we cannot warrantably, and in a Consistency with our *Testimony*, continue in *Secession* from the Judicatories of the established Church, but that we ought to have join'd in Ministerial Communion with them ? In order to
our

our delivering the sincere Sentiments of our Mind the more clearly upon this important and weighty Subject, we shall go through the above Grounds of our *Secession*, and impartially enquire if the General Assembly 1734 have removed the same; or, if they have so far reformed and amended the Evils we complain of in them, that it is now unlawful and unwarrantable for us to continue in *Secession* from the Judicatories of the Church.

The first Ground of our *Secession* (as laid in our *Testimony*) was, "That the prevailing Party at that Time in the Judicatories of the Church, did break down the Fences and Guards which former General Assemblies had wisely set up against Innovations in the Doctrine, Worship, Government and Discipline of this Church."

Upon this Head we complain, That the Act of Assembly 1730 discharging the recording of Reasons of Dissent in inferior Judicatories, and the Act of Assembly 1732 anent the Method of planting vacant Churches, were past contrary to the standing Rules regulating the Manner of passing Acts of general Concern to the Church, which require, that they be first transmitted to the Consideration of Presbyteries, and their Opinion and Consent reported to the next General Assembly, who may pass the same into Acts, if the more general Opinion of the Church agree thereto. But, in regard the General Assembly 1734 have rescinded the two foresaid Acts mainly upon the Ground complained of, therefore we are far from charging that Assembly with breaking down the Fences of our Constitution, or doing any Thing that had the least Aspect towards Tyranny in their Administration; on the contrary, we desire to bless the Lord, that they shewed such Dislike at these iniquous Statutes, that were so evidently everfive of the Constitution of this Church: And altho' the *Manner* in which they stand repealed may be afterwards considered, yet we freely own, that, as this first Ground of our *Secession*

is laid, it is removed by the last Assembly. But here it must be remembred, that our Seceſſion was not founded upon the paſſing of the Acts of Aſſembly 1730 and 1732 (as ſome have imagined it was) for we continued in Communion with the Church after theſe Acts were ingroſſed among the ſtanding and binding Rules thereof, and ſatisfied ourſelves with joining in a Proteſtation againſt the Act 1732, tho' it was not recorded, reſolving upon all proper Occaſions to teſtify againſt the ſame or like Deſections of this Church; but no ſooner was this eſſayed, than preſently the *Cenſures* of the Church were denounced againſt us, by the Judicatories at that Time: And therefore we were laid under a Neceſſity, either to make a *Seceſſion* from them, or ſilently and ſinfully to *quit the Field*, and never open our Mouths in Pulpit, or by *Proteſtation* in the ſupreme Judicatories, againſt ſuch Courses as had an evident Tendency to ruine our excellent Conſtitution. And, for the more clear underſtanding of our Caſe, it muſt be remembred, that this was the firſt and more immediate Ground of our Seceſſion from the Judicatories of the eſtabliſhed Church. We ſhall now go on to the

II. Ground of our Seceſſion from the prevailing Party at that Time, which was, "That they ſcrewed Church-authority to an *exorbitant Height*, by exercising a *legiſlative Power* over the Houſe of God, in Oppoſition to the Laws and Ordinances of the great Lord and Maſter of the Houſe, and, in Conſequence thereof, uſurped a *lordly and magiſterial Dominion* over the Flock and Heritage of God."

Under this Head we mention in our *Teſtimony* ſeveral Inſtances of *arbitrary Authority* exerciſed by ſome former Aſſemblies and their Commiſſions, contrary to, and inconfiſtent with, the Word of God. Here then the Queſtion will be, If the Aſſembly 1734 have condemned that uſurped Authority over the Houſe of God, and if the Heritage and Flock of God are liberate and ſet free from that lordly and magiſterial

Power, whereby unjust Decrees were bound upon their Consciences, and the Censures of the Church threatened, and actually inflicted upon them, in case they did not submit to the said unjust Decrees?

The 1st Instance we condescend upon of arbitrary Authority is the Act of Assembly 1732, which lodges the *decisive Power* of electing Ministers in a conjunct Meeting of *Elders* and *Heritors*, being Protestants, however much disaffected to the Government both in Church and State. As this was a delivering of a very valuable Trust and Privilege into the Hands of the avowed and declared Enemies of the Church, so it was evidently inconsistent with the *Word of God*, and the *Example of the Apostles* recorded in the New Testament, and contrary to the Practice of this Church ever since the *Reformation*, till of late; as appears from her Books of Discipline, Acts of Assembly, and manifold Decisions in Cases of this Nature. It is true, the Assembly 1734 have declared that Act to be no longer a binding Rule in this Church, but then they repealed it meerly because the Manner of enacting it was *not agreeable* to some excellent Acts which former Assemblies had wisely made as Safe-guards to our Constitution, and because it was *hurtful*, or bred some Disturbance in the Church: And indeed their reversing it, even upon this Score, was in so far Matter of Thankfulness; but, since such *manifest Dishonour* was done to our highest Lord, the only Lawgiver to his Church, by taking the legislative Power out of his Hands, in making a Statute for his Subjects, which the Authors thereof themselves acknowledge never came into his Mind, we could therefore have wished, that the Assembly had not only rescinded that Act upon the Grounds above-mentioned, but also because of its *Inconsistency with*, and *Contrariety to*, the *Word of God*: This was only the suitable Reparation could be made for the Dishonour done to the glorious Head of the Church, by enacting a Statute that did not bear the least Stamp of his Authority. And this still was the most necessary, because among all the Ministers of

of the Church of *Scotland* since the Reformation, that wrote upon this Subject, never any one impugned the *Necessity of the Consent of the Congregation*, or at least of the *Majority* of them, to fix the Relation of a Pastor to his Flock, till some late Prints appeared, which discover too much of a *prelatical Spirit*, and a manifest Design to *betray* and *give up* the Constitution of this Church; and surely, when the Members of a Church adventure to *write* against her Constitution, it is high Time for the Church to record her Testimony against their Tenents, that so Posterity may have no Reason to quote these Authors as giving the Opinion of the Church at that Time.

A 2d Instance we have mentioned of a lordly and magisterial Power exercised over the Flock and Heritage of God, is the violent *imposing* and *obtruding* of Ministers upon *dissenting* and *reclaiming Congregations* by some late Assemblies and their Commissions, not only upon the Footing of the Act 1732, but even of the *Patronage-act* itself; whereby the great End and Design of a Gospel-Ministry in the *Edification* of Souls was quite *marred* and *defeated*.

We are far from charging the Assembly 1734 with carrying on such arbitrary Measures; yea, upon the other Hand, they shewed a Disposition to *redress Grievances* of this Nature that came regularly before them: As for Instance, in the Case of the Parish of *Auchtermuchty*, they very justly reversed the Settlement of the Presentee, and allowed that People a *free Moderation*; and referred some other Causes of this Nature, which they could not overtake, to the next General Assembly: Yea, further, they shewed such *Dislike* at the arbitrary and unwarrantable Proceedings of the Commission, particularly in their *invading* the Rights of Presbyteries, by erecting *Subcommissions* with a Power to take Trial of the Gifts of young Men, and ordain them, contrary to the declared Mind both of the Presbyteries in which, and the Parishes over which, they were to be settled; that they *reversed* one of their Sentences appointing the Presentee to *Auchtermuchty* to be

settled in the above arbitrary Manner; whereby at length the Sentences of the Commission were found to be *reversible*, which is a considerable Step towards Reformation: Especially considering, that the Sentences of the Commission, however unjust and iniquous, were supported, and in a Manner held as irreversible by former Assemblies, without any other Redress but a simple Disapprobation of their Conduct. But, altho' the Assembly 1734 did not countenance any violent Settlement themselves, yet we crave Leave to say, That we have not as yet seen a sufficient Testimony against the manifest *Intrusions* that have been made in many Congregations of this Church. It is well known, that, by Acceptance of Presentations, a wide Door has been opened for the Entry of a *corrupt* and *law Ministry* into the Bosom of the Church; which, however much contrary to our avowed Principles, has been countenanced and encouraged by some former Assemblies and their Commissions, who all along owned *Patronage* to be a *Grievance*, and yet in the mean Time embraced every Opportunity to *favour the Presentee*, even altho' almost the whole Congregation were dissenting and reclaiming.

It was the laudible Practice of the reforming Assembly 1638 (even when Patronages were in full Force) That they *discharged any Person to be intruded in any Office of the Kirk, contrary to the Will of the Congregation to which they are appointed*. If something of this Nature were done, and if it were declared that the Acceptance of Presentations is *contrary to the Word of God*, and the Principles of this Church founded thereon, and that the Accepters are liable to *Censure*, this would be the best Mean to put an effectual Stop to the Oppression of Christian Congregations for the future, by the scandalous Acceptance of Presentations.

It is true, the last Assembly have appointed their Commission to petition his Majesty and Parliament for Relief from the Yoke of Patronage, and the Commission have accordingly nominate some worthy Brethren of their Number for that Purpose; but still there

was nothing to hinder them to declare their Principles upon this Head, as former Assemblies have done, even when the Patronage was in as great Force as it is at this Day. Nor would this have been a *Flying in the Face* of the Civil Law; for there is nothing in the Law obliging the Church to disclaim her Principles, or to act contrary to them: And, in this particular Case, the Act of Patronage doth not oblige the Presentee to accept, contrary to the Principles of the Church; it only makes the Acceptance a necessary Condition of the Validity of the Presentation; the Legislative thereby intending to *restrict* and *limit* the Patronage-act in Favours of the Church of Scotland, whose avowed Principles at that Time would not permit any of her Communion to accept of a Presentation in Opposition to the Consent of the People: And so it was interpreted by the Church herself for several Years after the Act was thus reviewed, *Anno 1719*; upon which account the Patrons very seldom made Use of their Right, till their accepted Presentations got a favourable Reception from the Judicatories of the Church, the prevailing Party finding no other Method so succesful for getting Men of loose Principles into the Ministry, who would therefore at any Rate be attach'd to their Interest. So that there was nothing to be feared from the Civil Magistrate, who was not imposing the Act of Patronage upon us, but allow'd it to be dormant even after it was revived, till the prevailing Party at that Time *wreath'd* it about the Neck of this Church, some by *accepting* Presentations themselves, and all of them by *encouraging* these that do so. From all which it is obvious, that the Assembly 1734 might have safely *declared* their Principles upon this Matter, even altho' they resolved to *address* the Legislative against it; and this Beginning of a Reformation at *Home*, would have given a surer Ground to expect Countenance to it from *Abroad*.

A 3d Instance of lordly and magisterial Power exercised over the Flock of God, which we complain of, is the Act of Assembly 1733, concerning the Presbytery

tery of *Dunfermline*, whereby the Ministers of that Presbytery are *discharged*, under Pain of the *highest Censure*, to dispense sealing Ordinances to any in the Parish of *Kinross*, without Consent or Permission of the present intruded Incumbent.

Now, from the Tenor of this Act it is plain, that it contains a virtual *Excommunication* of all the People in every Congregation thro' the Land, who cannot submit to the Ministry of these who are violently imposed upon them by the Judicatories of the Church; and also lays down a Precedent for *censuring*, or even *thrusting out* from Ministerial Communion with the Church, all Ministers who shall dispense sealing Ordinances to such of the Lord's People as have not Freedom to receive them from the Hands of Intruders, providing there be a Complaint tabled against them; as is obvious from the Reason which the Commission which met in *March 1734* gave, why they did not proceed to enquire into the Conduct of any of the Brethren in the Presbytery of *Dunfermline*, and censure them, as they were empower'd by the Assembly, *viz. Because there was no Complaint of their transgressing this Act*; from which it is manifest, that, if the Incumbent or any other had tabled a Complaint against them, the Contraveeners had been *censured*. If it is pled, That this Act of Assembly, complain'd of, was only a Decision in a particular Case, namely, that of the Presbytery of *Dunfermline* and Parish of *Kinross*; It is answered, That a Decision of a General Assembly in a particular Cause, being the publick Judgment of the *Church-Representative*, is reckoned to have the Force of a *Precedent* in all similar Cases, both by subsequent Assemblies and inferior Judicatories, and is the *Rule* they commonly walk by in Cases of the like Nature. And that this is a *sinful* Act, and contrary to the Word of God, is as plain, as it is certain that it is unlawful to intrude a Minister upon a People willing to have the Ordinances of Christ dispensed among them, and to submit to the Ministry of these who are set over them, in the Way the Lord *Jesus* has prescribed in his Word.

Now,

Now, the foresaid Act of Assembly, which appoints such severe Censures to be inflicted upon their Christian Brethren, both Ministers and People, who have not Freedom to give Countenance to the Ministry of such as are intruded upon Christian Congregations, appears to us to be an *unwarrantable Narrowing* of the Terms both of Ministerial and Christian Communion; a *Lording over the Heritage of God*, and contrary to one great End and Design of Church-government and Discipline, *viz.* the *Edification of the Body of Christ*; yet it stands untouch'd by the Assembly 1734, the Force of it is nowise abated by any Thing which that Assembly have done; nor is there the least Remedy provided for many Thousands in *Scotland*, who are thereby excommunicated from sealing Ordinances, for no other Reason but because they cannot take the Benefit of them from the Hands of *Intruders*. Since therefore the Assembly 1734 have noway invalidate the Force of this Act, nor given the least Testimony against it, our *Accession* to the Judicatories may be justly constructed to be a *submitting* ourselves to their Authority exercised according to the Rules of this Church presently in Being; and consequently not only a *virtual Approbation* of this Act, but also of all the *violent Settlements* which it was design'd to support. Yea further, our Accession, while this Act stands in Force, would be a plain *submitting* of the Question to the established Church, Whether we may relieve the oppress'd Heritage of God, or not? when it has been already given as *her Opinion*, that we must *not* do it, under the Pain of the highest Censure; and thus give our Consent that the oppress'd Congregations in *Scotland* shall be upon the Matter *excommunicated* from the Ordinances of Christ, and that they shall not be any Way supported, but *suppressed*, in contending for a covenanted Work of Reformation in their own Sphere; which would be *provoking* to God, *grieving* and *wounding* of his People, and of *dangerous Consequence* to the declining Interest of Christ in this Land. We proceed now to consider the

III. Ground of our Secession, which was, " That
 " the prevailing Party pursued such Measures, as did
 " actually *corrupt*, or at least had a *direct Tendency* to
 " corrupt, the *Doctrine* contained in our excellent
 " *Confession of Faith*."

When gross Errors are vented in a Church, and no
 suitable Testimony emitted against them, this Neglect
 has a direct Tendency to corrupt the Purity of Do-
 ctrine professed in that Church. It is too well known,
 to the sad Regrete of all who desire to believe in
 Jesus, that *Blasphemy* against the Son of God, with a
 Train of other *gross* and *dangerous Errors*, have been
 taught, and otherwise vented in this Church; and yet
 the Standard of a free and faithful Testimony has not
 been lifted up against them, by any of our former Ge-
 neral Assemblies, altho' frequently addressed by Pres-
 byteries and Synods, to hand down these valuable
 Truths, which have been deny'd and impugn'd in
 our Day, to the rising Generation, with a peculiar
 and solemn *Testimony* unto them; which was still the
 more necessary, considering the abounding of *Infide-
 lity*, and the daring *Impiety* of the profane *Wits* of the
 Age, who by their blasphemous Mouths and Pens
 have made no Scruple to run down the sacred Myste-
 ries of Christianity, which upon the other Hand has
 been basely *betrayed* by many of the *modern* Defenders
 thereof, who have at once given up with all the pecu-
 liar Doctrines of it, and have left nothing behind but
 a refin'd *System* of *natural Religion*.

Now, altho' such *damnable* and *pernicious Errors*
 have been vented and taught by some Members of
 this Church, as have a direct Tendency to lead all
 who imbibe them into *open Infidelity*; yet we say, That
 no suitable Testimony has been given, either against
 these *Tenets*, or the *Authors* of them. It was found
 clearly proven by the Assemblies 1727 and 1728, That
 Professor *Simson* denied the *Necessary Existence* and *su-
 preme Deity* of the SON of GOD; yet all the Resent-
 ment that the Assembly 1729 (which concluded that
 Pro-

Process) shewed against this *Blasphemer*, for unhinging the very Foundation of the Christian Religion, was only to suspend him from Teaching and Preaching, till another Assembly should think fit to relax him from that Sentence. And altho' it was also found proven by a Committee for *Purity of Doctrine*, appointed by the Assembly 1727, "That the said Mr. Simson had contraveen'd the Act of Assembly 1717, in venting some Opinions, which tended to attribute too much to natural Reason, and the Power of corrupt Nature, to the Disparagement of Revelation and efficacious free Grace ;" yet there was not the least Notice taken of these gross Errors : Which Neglect had a direct Tendency to *corrupt* the Purity of Doctrine professed in this Church, and was an Encouragement to Men of *loose Principles*, to vent their *false Notions* and *inconsistent Schemes*, without the least Fear of Censure ; as may be seen from the *bold Reflections* which Mr. Campbell at *St. Andrews* has made both upon natural and reveal'd Religion, in some late Papers emitted by him ; and by what Mr. Wallace Minister at *Edinburgh* has advanced in his Answer to a Letter directed to him concerning the *positive Institutions of Christianity* ; and also from the *Method of Preaching* practised by a great many who have lately entred into the Ministry, who have so far discarded all the pecaliar and supernatural Doctrines of the Gospel, that one would scarce know by their Discourses, whether they were so much as *profess'd Christians*.

These are the *fatal* Consequences of declining to give a suitable Testimony against the Errors of the Times, and particularly to assert the *Necessary Existence* and *Independency* of the great God our Saviour, when so loudly call'd to it by the open *Impugning* of his *Supreme Deity*. And as this was one chief Ground of our Secession from the prevailing Party in the Judicatories of the Church, that they gave a *deaf Ear* to all Applications that were made for maintaining and preserving the Purity of Doctrine, which was in such imminent Danger, by the *growing Errors* of the Day ;

so the Question will be, If the Assembly 1734 have done any Thing to supply that great Defect? especially when the *sinful Omission* of this necessary and important Duty may be justly look'd upon as the main Spring of the Lord's *Controversy* with the Judicatories of the Church, in leaving them to drive on to that Height of Defection which they lately arrived at. We do not incline to challenge the Assembly 1734 with a *design'd* and *wilful Neglect* of testifying against the above-mentioned Errors; we know they met with considerable *Interruptions* from a Party that wanted by all Means to retard their Work: But yet, since it cannot be said that this Ground of our Secession is in the least removed, therefore we will be the more easily excused, if we cannot with Freedom (as we are situate in Providence) accede unto the Judicatories of a Church, where *Truth lies bleeding in her Streets*, without any suitable Testimony unto it. We proceed now to consider the

Last Ground of our Secession from the prevailing Party at that Time, which was, "That they restrain-
" ed Ministerial Freedom and Faithfulness, in testi-
" fying against the Defections and Backslidings of the
" Times."

The *Restraint* which the Assembly 1733 did put upon Ministerial Freedom and Faithfulness in testifying against the Evils and Corruptions of our Day, with the Proceedings of the Commission thereupon, was that which gave the first Rise to our present Secession, because we were thereby *precluded* from keeping up a proper Testimony against the *Church-ruining Courses* of the then prevailing Party in a Way of Ministerial Communion with them. There are but two Ways whereby a Minister can testify against the Defections of a Church; either by giving *faithful Warning* of them from the Pulpit, or by *protesting* against them in a Judicatory as he has Access, that thereby he may transmit to Posterity a Testimony to the Truths of Christ against the Corruptions or Defections that may

may prevail in a Church. Now, we were excluded from keeping up a standing Testimony in either of these two Methods: When Mr. *Erskine* upon a very proper Occasion *testified* from the Pulpit against the Act of Assembly 1732, and the violent Proceedings of the Church-Judicatories at that Time, he was for this *censured* by the Assembly: And when we *protested* against that Censure, because we judged it a manifest *Restraint* upon our Freedom and Faithfulness as Ministers, we were presently threatned with *Suspension* and *higher Censures*, unless we retract the same; altho' protesting against a Protestant Council or Assembly was no new Thing, as we have shown in some former Prints. Now, Ecclesiastical Tyranny did appear to us to rise to a very great Height, when *first* the very Foundation of our Church-Constitution was undermined, and *then* Censures inflicted upon these who gave Warning against the same, which had a manifest Tendency to betray, by *silent Treachery*, the City of God into the Hands of her Enemies, and bring on inevitable Ruin and Destruction upon this Church, before ever she should have Time to provide for her Safety. That this is a warrantable Ground of Secession, the very Nature of the Thing bears: For, how can a Man join in Communion with a Church, which obliges him to *Silence* in the Pulpit, and to acquiesce in the Judgment of the supreme Judicatory, however prejudicial to the established Doctrine, Government and Discipline of that Church, without being allowed to give any *standing Testimony* against it? And because this *Restraint of Ministerial Freedom* is the first and more immediate Point upon which our Secession turned, therefore we will be obliged to enquire the more narrowly what the Assembly 1734 have done towards the *Removal* of the same, in Regard it has been asserted, That they have at least *materially* rescinded the Act of Assembly 1733 concerning the four Brethren, and that they have taken off the Restraint laid upon Ministerial Freedom by the said Act and Sentence of the Assembly 1733.

That therefore we may deliver our Thoughts the more distinctly upon this Head, we shall enquire, (1.) If the Assembly 1734 have either *formally* or *materially* repealed the Act and Sentence of the Assembly 1733 concerning the four Brethren. (2.) We shall take a more particular View of the Act of Assembly 1734 itself, appointing the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling*, under the Limitations therein specified, to *restore* the four Brethren to Ministerial Communion with this Church, together with the Act and Sentence of the Synod in Consequence thereof. (3.) We shall consider the Act of Assembly 1734 concerning *Ministerial Freedom*, which is said to be explicatory of the Act and Sentence 1733. We think ourselves the more bound to make a *particular Enquiry* into these Things, both for a Discovery of the present Situation of Affairs in this Church, and also to represent unto our Reverend Brethren the Necessity there is of repealing the Acts complained of, both for the Sake of the *publick Cause*, and for their own *Safety* in the faithful Discharge of their Ministry. We begin then with the

First of these, to enquire if the Assembly 1734 have either *formally* or *materially* repeal'd the Act and Sentence of the Assembly 1733 concerning the *four Brethren*, so that it cannot for the future militate against them, or any other Minister of this Church in the faithful Discharge of his Duty.

That the above Act and Sentence of the Assembly 1733 was *formally* or *expresly* repealed by the Assembly 1734, none will readily assert: Yet, considering that this Act and Sentence of Assembly 1733, complain'd of, had an evident Tendency to *bury* the Reformation-principle of *private Judgment*, in examining all Church-decisions by the Rule of the Word; considering that they thereby endeavoured to render quite *ineffectual* the Duty and Liberty of Ministers, as faithful Watchmen, to give *Warning* of approaching Danger to the City of God, by appointing Suspension
and

and higher Censures to pass upon so many of them for witnessing for the injured Interest of Christ, and against them, and thereby excluding these Ministers from any further Access to contend, in a Way of Communion, against the Defections that prevail'd among them: We say, Since the above Act and Sentence of the Assembly 1733 did so manifestly lift up an Authority *merely human* above, and in Opposition to, the Authority of the King of Zion, whereby it bears such an open and explicate Affront of the glorious Head of the Church, it certainly deserved to have been as explicitly condemned by the Assembly 1734.

But we add further, That this *bold Thrust* aimed by the said Act 1733 against the Crown and Dignity of the King of Zion, the only Lawgiver to his Church, is not so much as *materially* condemned, or any way invalidated by the Act of Assembly 1734 concerning the four Brethren, so as that it cannot afterwards affect them, or any other Minister in this Church, who shall testify against the Defections of the Times. But, before we enter upon this, it will be necessary to insert the Act itself, the Tenor whereof follows.

At *Edinburgh, May 14. 1734.*

“ **T**HE General Assembly considering the great
 “ Hurt and Prejudice that hath at all Times
 “ arisen, and must yet arise to the Church, from Divisions and Animosities creeping in, and taking Root
 “ among the Members thereof, notwithstanding
 “ of their Unanimity in Sentiments upon material
 “ and fundamental Points, which more nearly concern the promoting the Interest of our blessed Lord
 “ and Saviour, the establishing the Peace of the
 “ Church, and the Advancement of practical Godliness and true Religion within the Bounds of it;
 “ and particularly, the lamentable Consequences that
 “ have followed, and may yet follow upon the Separation of Masters *Ebenezer Erskine, William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher* from this
 “ Church and Judicatories thereof; and judging it
 “ their

" their Duty to endeavour by all just and proper
 " Means, consistent with the Honour and Glory of
 " God, and the maintaining the Peace and Authority
 " of this Church, to restore Harmony and brotherly
 " Love among all the Members of it: Therefore
 " the General Assembly, without further enquiring
 " into the Occasions or Steps of Proceeding, either on
 " Part of the said Brethren, or by the several Judi-
 " catories under whose Consideration their Case hath
 " been, which may have produced that unhappy Se-
 " paration; but resolving that all Questions upon these
 " Heads shall for hereafter be comfortably removed,
 " have impowered, and hereby do impower the Synod
 " of *Perth* and *Stirling* (before whom the Exceptions
 " to some Part of the Conduct of two of these four
 " Reverend Brethren were first taken and tried) upon
 " such Application made to them as they shall judge
 " proper, to take the Case of the said four Brethren,
 " as it now stands, under their Consideration, with
 " full Power to the said Synod to proceed and do
 " therein as they shall find most justifiable and expe-
 " dient for restoring the Peace, and preserving the
 " Authority of this Church, and for promoting the
 " Edification of the Members of the Body of Christ;
 " and particularly for uniting the said four Brethren
 " to the Communion of this Church, and restoring
 " them to their respective Ministerial Charges:
 " But with this express Direction, That the said Sy-
 " nod shall not take upon them to judge of the Le-
 " gality or Formality of the former Proceedings of the
 " Church-judicatories in Relation to this Affair, or
 " either to approve or censure the same; but shall
 " only, in Vertue of the Power and Authority now
 " delegated to them by the Assembly, proceed to take
 " such Steps for attaining the above Ends for the fu-
 " ture, as they shall find just, and tending to Edification.
 " And the Assembly do hereby appoint the foresaid
 " Synod to meet at *Stirling* the first *Tuesday* of *July*
 " next, and from Time to Time to name and appoint
 " the Place and Diets of their After-meeting on the
 " said

“ said Affair as they shall see Cause, until the Matter
 “ shall be ripened for a final Conclusion; and recom-
 “ mend to them to use their utmost Endeavours to
 “ bring the Matter, as soon as reasonably can be, to a
 “ final and happy Issue.”

Now, from the Tenor of the above Act it will plainly appear, that the Act and Sentence of the Assembly 1733 concerning the four Brethren is not so much as upon the Matter rescinded, if the following Considerations be duly weighed.

1. The Assembly 1734 in the above Act refuse to enquire into the *Steps* of Proceeding taken by the several Judicatories, under whose Consideration the Case of the four Brethren hath been; that is, they plainly declare that they will not so much as enter upon the Consideration of the Act of Assembly 1733, or the Conduct of their Commission in Consequence thereof. Can it then be said, that they have in any Shape whatsoever repealed the said Act? But this will appear further, if it is considered,

2. That the Assembly 1734 peremptorily discharge the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling* to judge of the *Legality* or *Formality* of the Proceedings of the Church-judicatories in relation to this Affair, or either to approve or censure the same: From whence it is plain, that the Act of Assembly 1733, and the Proceedings of the Judicatories thereupon, are noway affected by the Act of Assembly 1734, either as to their *Legality* or *Formality*. For, tho' it might be alledged, that a Synod cannot regularly judge of, approve or condemn an Act of Assembly, such as the Act 1733 certainly is; yet no reasonable Objection can be made, why the Assembly 1734 could not have judged of the *Legality* and *Formality* of the Act of the former Assembly, and of the Proceedings of the Judicatories thereupon; and then in that Case there would have been a clear Ground for the Synod to have judged and declared, That the Act 1733, and the Proceedings of the Judicatories in Consequence of it, had been found

illegal

Illegal and informal by the Assembly 1734. But, since the Synod is *bound up*, by the Assembly 1734, from judging the said Proceedings of the Judicatories to be either *illegal* or *informal*, it is certain that the Assembly have thereby declared, That, notwithstanding of what they have enacted with respect to that Affair, the Proceedings of the Church-judicatories thereanent may still in themselves be both *legal* and *formal*: For it cannot be well understood, if we should suppose that the Assembly 1734 should have any Way *affected* the Legality of these Sentences by their own Act, and yet have discharged the Synod, their own Delegates in this Matter, to tell the World that they have *done so*; especially when this was an Affair committed in a special Manner to their Management.

3. The Synod are ordered to proceed in the Case of the four Brethren, as they shall find most *justifiable* and *expedient* for preserving the Authority of this Church: Now, it is certain that the Authority of this Church was no further concerned in this Matter, but as it is supposed to be *weakned* by the four Brethren their *refusing* to pay a due Regard to the Act 1733 and the Proceedings of the Church-judicatories thereupon, which is the main Thing in the present Question; and they contend, That *no Respect* ought to be paid to Ecclesiastical Authority, when lifted up in *Opposition to the unerring Rule of the Word*, as it was evidently done by the Assembly 1733. But however, since the Assembly 1734 have so strictly recommended it to the Synod, that they take Care to *preserve* the Authority of the Church, with respect to the Act 1733, and the Proceedings of the Judicatories thereupon, it is plain that they have not annulled and made void these Proceedings.

4. The Assembly 1734 expressly declare, That the Ground and Reason they proceeded upon in empowering the Synod of *Perth*, as above, was the Consideration of the lamentable Consequences that have followed and may yet follow upon the *Separation* (as they are

are pleased to term it) of the four Brethren: From which it is obvious, That, for any Thing the Assembly 1734 have enacted in this Matter, the Act of Assembly 1733 may be a Rule in a Way of Precedent, for prosecuting the Members of the Church before her Judicatories, unless the Judicatories may reasonably apprehend, that the same lamentable Consequences may again follow upon the said Prosecution, *i. e.* unless there shall be four Brethren reputed *Socii Criminis*, who may happen at the same Time, and by the same Judicatories, to be *suspended*, and declared *no more Ministers of this Church*, and who may, upon Grounds they think just, make a *Secession* from the prevailing corrupt Party of the established Church, and upon that Footing constitute themselves into a *Presbytery*, for the Relief of the oppressed Heritage of God thro' the Land, as well as for the regular Exercise of Discipline in their own Congregations, and who shall proceed as above, at such a Time and Season, when there is as much Zeal remaining for our Constitution among Ruling Elders and the People of God in the Land, as makes it probable that a Secession of that Kind may be of some Use to support a Constitution otherwise keenly run down and almost subverted: We say, it is plain that it was upon the Consideration of the (supposed) *lamentable Consequences* that followed, or might follow upon the Sentences of the Judicatories, that the Assembly 1734 impowered the Synod in the Manner they did, and not upon the Consideration of the *Sinfulness* and *Injustice* of the Acts and Sentences past by them. From which it certainly follows, that the Acts and Sentences themselves are not condemned, but must in the Nature of the Thing be constructed to be *legal, formal* and *valid* still, and of *sufficient Force and Authority*, when imitated as *lawful Precedents* by other Judicatories, to lay open all the Ministers of this Church to be prosecuted, if they shall use their Ministerial Freedom, as the four Brethren have done, in testifying against the Defections of this Church; whereby a wide Door is as yet open to the corrupt Party, who

are still abundantly numerous in this Church, to intimidate others into a *sinful Silence* in the publick Cause, and to give them an Opportunity to *bury* a covenanted Work of Reformation, and to *suppress* effectually all who testify for it. So that upon the whole it plainly appears, That the above Act of the Assembly 1734 has not repealed nor annulled the Act of Assembly 1733 concerning the four Brethren; and therefore it remains an *Act* and *Rule* of this Church still, so far as an *Act* in a particular Case is a *Rule* in a Way of Precedent in Cases of the like Nature. In a Word, How can it be reasonably alledged, that the Sinfulness of the Act 1733 is removed, when it is not so much as once acknowledged, to the Glory of God, that there is one wrong Thing in it? And how can it be said to be in any Shape repealed, when the Assembly 1734 expressly declare that they will not so much as enter upon the Consideration of it, and also discharge the Synod to judge it either informal or illegal? It is true, the Assembly 1734 have impowered the Synod, under such and such Restrictions, to unite the four Brethren to Communion with this Church, and to their respective Charges; and the Synod have accordingly restored them in Terms of the Assembly's Act: But then it must be observed, that, according to this Act of Assembly 1734, the Brethren are to be united to the Communion of the Church, without any Judgment passed by the Assembly themselves, or the Synod their Delegates, as to the Legality and Formality of the Acts and Sentences past against them. Now, since the Sentences of any Judicatory, especially the Supreme, are to be esteemed *legal* and *formal*, till they are *reviewed* by a Court that has Power and Authority for that Effect; it follows, that the Brethren, when restored to the Communion of this Church, must be in a very strange and unheard-of Situation, namely, They are *de facto* or some Way or other Ministers of this Church, and at the same Time *de jure* they are *not* Ministers of this Church, nor have any Relation to their Ministerial Charges,

because the Acts and Sentences past against them are both *legal* and *formal*, and must remain so till another Assembly (who are the only proper Judges in this Affair) shall think fit to reverse and annul them. We proceed now,

II. To make some further Observes upon the Act of Assembly 1734 concerning the four Brethren, and the Act and Sentence of the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling* which is founded thereon; and it is not our Design hereby to reflect upon the Assembly 1734, but to shew the Necessity of reviewing the Acts of Assembly 1733, both concerning some Ministers in the Presbytery of *Dunfermline*, and also concerning the four Brethren, since there is as yet no standing Testimony against the *Dishonour* we apprehend is done to the only Lord and Lawgiver of the Church by these Acts. If then the Act of Assembly 1734 concerning the four Brethren be narrowly viewed, the following *Conclusions* will appear to be abundantly obvious;

I. The Act of Assembly 1734, as it is laid, plainly asserts, "That there is an *Unanimity* in Sentiments among the Members of this Church, upon *material* and *fundamental Points*, which more nearly concern the promoting the Interest of our blessed Lord and Saviour." This gives a very favourable, but at the same Time not such a fair View to Posterity, of the present Situation of Affairs in this Church: For, upon the reading of these Words, one would be ready to imagine, that the Differences that were at this Time among the Members of the Church, were only about *trifling* and *smaller* Matters, and consequently the Authors of them justly to be reputed *Schismatics*; whereas 'tis well known, that the Subject, not only of our present *Testimony*, but also of many *Petitions* and *Representations* from several Synod and Presbyteries (quite disregarded by former Assemblies) was against *oppressing* the Heritage of God, by *obtruding* Hirelings upon it, and then excommunicating such from Sealing Ordinances, as had not Freedom to submit to the Ministry of these *Intruders*; against *Lukewarmness* in the

Cause of Truth, and *Defect* of Zeal for the Glory and Honour of the Son of God, boldly attacked by a *Blasphemer*; against *invading* the Rights of radical Judicatories, by appointing Committees to *lord* it over Presbyteries and the People of God through the Land; and *lastly*, against *assuming* a *legislative Power* over the House of God, by enacting Laws that did not bear the least Stamp of the Authority of the great Lord and Lawgiver of the House, and *lifting up* their human Decisions so far above the Examination of the Word, that whoever should witness against them, was presently to become obnoxious to their *Censures*; whereby there was a manifest Restraint laid upon Ministerial Freedom and Faithfulness in testifying against the Defections of the Times. Now, these are the Points which are the Subject of our present Differences; and we leave it to the impartial World to judge, whether they are not *material*, and such Points as affect the very *Foundation* of our Church-government and Constitution, and consequently very nearly concern the Interest of our blessed Lord and Saviour.

2. Since the Act of Assembly supposes that there is an Unanimity in Sentiments among the Members of this Church upon *material* and *fundamental* Points which more nearly concern the establishing the Peace of the Church, then it plainly follows, That the *Divisions* and *Animosities* (which, the Act says, have crept in and taken Place among the Members thereof) must certainly be owing to the four Brethren, and some other Ministers who have given open and publick Testimony against the Defections of the Times: This is very obvious; for, if the Generality of the Members of this Church are unite in their Sentiments about these Points which they say more nearly concern the promoting the Interest of the Redeemer, and the establishing the Peace of the Church, then surely the four Brethren, about whom this Act is made, must be the *Disturbers* of that Peace, and the *Authors* of these Divisions complained of in the Narrative of the said Act: Whereas the Disturbances that are presently in the Church

Church ought to be landed upon the *corrupt prevailing Party* in the Judicatories thereof, who have carried on a Course of Defection with an high Hand, and not upon these who have given Testimony against the said backsliding Course.

3. When the Assembly 1734 declare, That they are not further to enquire into the *Occasions*, or *Steps of Proceeding*, either on the Part of the four Brethren, or by the several Judicatories under whose Consideration their Case hath been, but resolve that all Questions upon these Heads shall for hereafter be comfortably removed; it follows, that they have dropt every Branch of the Testimony which the four Brethren have given: For, when they resolve that they will not further enquire into the Occasions which may have produced (what they call) that *unhappy Separation* upon the Part of the four Brethren, it is plain that they have dropt all the Grounds of their Secession at once, for these occasioned their Separation; and this renders the Accession of the Brethren the more difficult, because in this Case they would be supposed to *accede* to a Church who at least by this Act seem to have dropt the Testimony which they hold: For it is impossible to accede to a Church, but in the Situation she is in when the Accession is made; and an Accession to her in that Situation, so far approves of the same, as to subject it to her Authority, and submit it to her Direction, what may be accounted *Defections*, and what not; and what is a regular Way of testifying, and what a disorderly Course of that Nature. And, if she maintains not the same Testimony with these who are supposed to accede, it follows that the Minority must be concluded by the major Part; and therefore, by their Accession, their Testimony is fallen from, and no more to be maintain'd, at least in a Way of Church-communion, till the Majority have Light to take up the same of their own Accord.

4. When the Assembly impower the Synod to take the Case of the four Brethren under their Consideration, providing there be *such Application* made to them

as they shall judge proper, it follows, that that uncommon and *arbitrary* Procedure, in *suspending* and otherwise *censuring* these Brethren, for no other Reason but for testifying against the Defections of the Times, was so ly disregarded, unless such Application should be made, as the Synod should judge proper; whereas the manifest Ineroachment made upon the Privileges of the Members of this Church, by the Assembly 1733 and their Commission, deserved to have been noticed, even without the Ceremony of an *Application* to be made in favours of the four Brethren. Besides, when the Assembly require such Application as the Synod shall judge proper, it plainly supposes, that, in the Eye of this Act of Assembly, the Brethren were guilty of some *bainous Crime*, in protesting before the Assembly 1733 for their *just Right and Privilege to testify against the Defections of the Day*; for this was the sole Ground of the Censures that past upon them: Only the Assembly 1734, for Peace Sake, so far connive at their Guilt in this Matter, that they are willing these Sentences be taken off, providing they so far take with their Offence, as to make Application themselves for that Effect, or others do it in their Favours, that so the *Authority* of the Church, interposed in the passing of these Sentences, may be some way kept up. And this is another Difficulty in the Way of our Accession, when the Judicatories of the Church still look upon us as Criminals, altho' they can charge us with nothing but standing up in Defence of our Reformation-principles, at a Time when they were most likely to be run down, and buried in Oblivion.

5. When the Assembly order the Synod to take Care to *preserve* the *Authority* of the Church, and discharge them to judge of the Legality or Formality of the Proceedings of the Church-judicatories in Relation to this Affair, it is plain (as has been before observed) that the Sentences past by the Assembly 1733 and their Commission, stand in *full Force* as to their Legality and Formality; only, for the Sake of Peace,
the

the Rigour of them may be relaxed as to the four Brethren for this Time, upon the Conditions and Limitations expressed in the Act itself.

6. In regard the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling* were clothed with the Assembly's Power in this Matter, it will not be amiss to insert *what* they have done, in this Place, that the Reader may have a full View of this whole Affair. The Tenor of their Act is as follows:

At *Stirling*, July 2. 1734.

“ THE Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling* having, in
 “ Obedience to the Act and Appointment of
 “ the General Assembly, dated at *Edinburgh* the 14th
 “ Day of *May* last, met and conven'd at *Stirling* this
 “ Day, and taking the Case of the four Brethren,
 “ Masters *Ebenezer Erskine*, *William Wilson*, *Alexan-*
 “ *der Moncrieff*, and *James Fisher*, under their Consi-
 “ deration, with the Power and Authority delegated
 “ to them by the said General Assembly to do therein
 “ as they should find most justifiable and expedient for
 “ attaining the Ends mentioned in the said Act, and
 “ tending most for Edification for the future; and also
 “ considering the Applications that have been made,
 “ and Petitions and Addresses to this Synod from
 “ Towns and Parishes concerned, in Behalf of these
 “ Brethren; and remembring how warmly the Elders
 “ in many Parishes of this Province did address their
 “ respective Presbyteries in their Favours, before the
 “ last Assembly; and after long and serious Delibera-
 “ tion and Reasoning upon the whole Case of the said
 “ four Brethren, as it now stands; They are of Opi-
 “ nion, that restoring and uniting them to Ministerial
 “ Communion with this Church, to their respective
 “ Charges, and to the Judicatories to which they
 “ belong, and the free Exercise of their Ministerial
 “ Function therein, by a solemn Act and judicial
 “ Deed of the General Assembly of this Church,
 “ whose Power and Authority as to this Matter is by
 “ the formentioned Act delegated to this Synod,
 “ will

" will very much tend to restore the Peace, and pre-
 " serve the just Authority of this Church, in the Ex-
 " ercise of all its righteous Privileges and Ministerial
 " Functions, and to promote the Edification of the
 " Members of the Body of Christ: Therefore this
 " Synod, by Vertue of the foresaid delegate Power
 " and Authority, and in Name of our LORD JE-
 " SUS CHRIST, did, and hereby do, with one
 " Voice and Consent, take off the Sentences pronoun-
 " ced by the Commission of the General Assembly
 " 1733 against the foresaid four Brethren, Masters
 " *Ebenezer Erskine, William Wilson, Alexander Mon-*
 " *crieff, and James Fisher,* declaring the same of no
 " Force or Effect for the future; unite and restore
 " them to Ministerial Communion with this Church,
 " to their several Charges, and to the Exercise of all
 " Parts of the Ministerial Function therein, as fully
 " and freely as there never had been Act, Sentence,
 " Obstacle or Impediment whatsoever in the Way
 " thereof in Time past; all which are hereby decla-
 " red sopite, and set aside for the future: And the
 " Synod do recommend to these four Reverend Bre-
 " thren, to carry towards the Lord's Servants their
 " Brethren, Ministers of this Church, and their re-
 " spective Flocks and Charges, as Ministers of Christ
 " and his Gospel ought to do, in all Time coming;
 " and they do in the like Manner recommend it to
 " the respective Presbyteries of *Perth, Stirling* and
 " *Dunkeld,* to receive them as Members of their respec-
 " tive Presbyteries, and behave towards them as Mini-
 " sters of Christ in this Church; and do enjoin, not
 " only the Ministers of the said Presbyteries, but also
 " of all other Presbyteries in their Bounds, and the
 " said four Brethren, so to demean themselves toward
 " each other, as may answer the Obligations they
 " came under by their Ordination-vows in the Lord:
 " And the Synod take this Opportunity to warn all
 " the People in this Province to beware of every Thing
 " may have a Tendency to obstruct the good Ends of
 " this Act, and what the late General Assembly had

" so much at Heart, viz. the Peace and Union of this
 " Church, by doing what may encourage Division, or
 " weaken the Hands of the Lord's Servants set over
 " them: And further, the Synod appoint the Names of
 " the said four Brethren to be immediately inroll'd
 " in the Rolls of this Synod, and that Mr. *Hamilton*
 " read this Act from the Pulpit of *Stirling*, Mr.
 " *Black* from the Pulpit of *Perth*, Mr. *Meek* from the
 " Pulpit of *Abernethy*, and Mr. *Gow* from the Pulpit
 " of *Kinclaven*, on some Lord's Day betwixt and the
 " first of *August*; and the Synod recommend it to Mr.
 " *Hamilton* to acquaint Mr. *Erskine*, Mr. *M^r Intosh* to
 " acquaint Mr. *Wilson*, Mr. *Pilmar* to acquaint Mr.
 " *Moncrieff*, and Mr. *Gow* to acquaint Mr. *Fisher*, of
 " this Act and Sentence with their first Conveniency.
 " And finally, they appoint this Act to be insert in
 " all the Presbytery-books within this Province, and
 " they leave it to every Minister to intimate the same
 " to their Congregations as they see Cause. Ex-
 " tracted, &c."

Now, since the above Act is supposed to conclude
 the Affair concerning the four Brethren, we crave
 Leave, with all due Deference to our reverend Bre-
 thren who met at that Time, to remark, That as their
 Act is framed upon the Model of the above Act of
 Assembly 1734, as indeed it could not well otherwise
 be; so they lay the four Brethren under a greater
 Restraint, than the Assembly 1734 their Constituents
 by their Act obliged them to, when they recommend
 it to the four Brethren, " To carry towards the Lord's
 " Servants their Brethren, Ministers of this Church,
 " and their respective Flocks and Charges, as Mini-
 " sters of Christ and his Gospel ought to do, in all
 " Time coming." i. e. That they refrain from admi-
 nistrating sealing Ordinances to any of the Lord's
 People, who even happen to reside in Congregations
 who have had Hirelings obtruded upon them. For
 altho' the Words of the Act be general, respecting all
 such as are reputed Ministers of this Church; yet,

since our Testimony is mainly levelled against the corrupt Party in the Judicatories of the Church who are carrying on a Course of Defection, and particularly against such as have intruded themselves upon dissenting and reclaiming Congregations, severals whereof are within the Bounds of this Synod; therefore this special Recommendation given to the four Brethren, must have an Aspect chiefly to those: Otherwise it was to no Purpose, to recommend it so particularly to them to carry in a brotherly Manner towards the Lord's faithful and sent Servants, when they have so publickly declared, that they have not made a Secession from them, but are willing to maintain Ministerial Communion with them. And that this is the true Meaning, will appear further, from the solemn Warning that they give unto all the People in this Province, even to the People of *Muckbart*, &c. "To beware of every Thing that may encourage Division from, or weaken the Hands of the Lord's Servants set over them;" that is, That they submit to the Ministry even of such Intruders, and take sealing Ordinances from their Hands. So that the Synod have proceeded a Step further than the Assembly 1734 have done; and if this Act of theirs shall come to be inserted among the Records of the Assembly 1735, it will be interpreted as corroborative of the Act Assembly of 1733 concerning some Ministers in the Presbytery of *Dunfermline*, which virtually excommunicates all the Lord's People thro' the Land, who cannot submit to the Ministry of Intruders. We do not say that our Reverend Brethren, who were the Framers of this Act, had any such Design; but it is plain that the Act is so laid, as that the corrupt Party, if ever they have Opportunity, may make a Handle of it to censure those who administer sealing Ordinances to the Lord's oppress'd People in this Church.

III. We proceed now to consider the Act of Assembly 1734 concerning Ministerial Freedom, which

is said to be explicatory of the Act and Sentence 1733. The Tenor of this Act is as follows;

At Edinburgh, May 14th 1734.

“ **T**HE General Assembly of the Church of
 “ Scotland considering, That some are under
 “ Apprehensions, that by the Act of Assembly 1733
 “ anent Mr. *Erskine*, &c. Ministers of this Church
 “ are laid under greater Restraints as to Ministerial
 “ Freedom, than they were by the Rules of this
 “ Church before the said Act was past; therefore
 “ they do, for the Satisfaction of all, hereby declare,
 “ That due and regular Ministerial Freedom is still
 “ left entire to all Ministers; and that the same *was*
 “ *not*, nor shall be held or understood to be anywise
 “ impaired or restrained by the late Assembly’s Deci-
 “ sion in that particular Process.”

What the Assembly means by *due and regular Ministerial Freedom*, they have not told us; but, if we compare this, and the other Act of the same Date, with the Act and Sentence of Assembly 1733, we will easily find, that the Freedom used by Mr. *Erskine* in the Pulpit of *Perth*, in testifying against the Act of Assembly 1732, and the violent Proceedings of the Church-judicatories at that Time, and the Freedom which the four Brethren used in protesting for the faithful Exercise of their Ministry, and against all Restraints upon the same, was not *due and regular Ministerial Freedom*. This is far from a strain’d Consequence, the Words of the Act itself expressly bear so much; for it says, That due and regular Ministerial Freedom *was not* anywise impair’d or restrain’d by the Decision of the Assembly 1733 in this particular Process. Now, upon the first Reading of the said Act and Sentence 1733, these two Facts will be obvious; *First*, That Mr. *Erskine* was rebuk’d at the Bar of that Assembly, for testifying against some Acts of Assembly and Proceedings of Church-judicatories; and *then*, That the Commission was appointed to suspend

and inflict higher Censures upon all the four Brethren, for protesting against the above Decision of the Assembly, unless they should retract the same. From whence it is plain, that the Faithfulness which Mr. Erskine used in preaching against the Defections of the Times, was *de facto* impaired ; for he was rebuked : And it is as plain, that the Liberty we all four used, in protesting against a bad Decision of an Assembly, was also restrained ; for the Sentences which were afterwards inflicted by the Commission, were presently threatened by the Assembly ; there being no other Reason condescended upon for these severe Censures, but simply our offering to protest against the Assembly. And therefore, since, according to the Words of this Act, due and regular Ministerial Freedom was not restrained by the Sentence of Assembly 1733, it plainly follows, that the above-mentioned Freedom which we have used, is *not* due and regular Ministerial Freedom ; for it was manifestly restrained, as we have just now made appear : So that this Act seems to be such an Explication of the Act 1733, as is a plain *Vindication* of it.

The Meaning then of the above Act of Assembly appears to us to be shortly this ; That Ministers of this Church are allowed Ministerial Freedom, providing they do not from the Pulpit testify against the Unwarrantableness of any Act of Assembly or Proceedings of Church-judicatories, and providing they do not protest against an Assembly, even tho' they should proceed to inflict Censures on their Brethren for such a Testimony. This is the Amount of what some call the *explicatory Act* ; and however others may think there is something satisfying in it, yet it cannot (as it is framed) give Satisfaction to the four Brethren, or any who are of the same Sentiments with them, anent the Duty of Ministers, from the Word of God, their Ordination-vows, and our Covenants National and Solemn League, to *oppose* with Zeal and Resolution, all *Innovations* and *exorbitant Heights* of Church-power, which

which tend to *subvert* and *overturn* our valuable Church constitution.

From what we have said concerning these two Acts of Assembly 1734, it evidently appears, that there is a manifest Connection between them and the Act and Sentence of Assembly 1733 concerning the four Brethren: And, if the Act of the Synod of *Perth* and *Stirling* should happen to be insert among the Records of Assembly 1735, then there will be the Acts of three several Assemblies running, all *restraining* the Freedom and Liberty of Ministers in testifying against Acts of Assembly however iniquous, and the Proceedings of Church-judicatories however arbitrary and tyrannical, and also condemning their Right to protest against an Assembly upon any Occasion whatsoever, even when inflicting their Censures for no other Reason but testifying against their Defections. From all which it appears, how necessary it is, that the Church, by a judicial Deed, give a *standing Testimony* against the manifest Incroachment made upon Ministerial Freedom by the Assembly 1733, and nowise disapproved by the Assembly 1734, in regard that nothing less than an *explicite* and *formal* Repeal of an iniquous Statute is necessary for the Reparation of the Dishonour done to the glorious Head of the Church by enacting of it.

Thus we have considered the Grounds of our *Secession* from that Party in the Church, who appeared to us to have a very active Hand in pursuing such Measures as must in the Issue have landed in the *Subversion* and *Ruin* of the whole of our covenanted Reformation; as also what the last General Assembly have done for removing the Grounds upon which our Secession was laid. And, from what is above represented, every one may easily see what are the *Reasons* why we have not as yet acceded to the Judicatories of the Church: And as we can sincerely say, That there is nothing we more desire than Union in the Lord with our Brethren; so it will be Matter of Joy unto us, and many of the Lord's People through the Land, if our Sins and Backslidings from the Lord were particularly ac-

knowledged and forsaken, and if a Work of Re-
 formation were seriously set about; that is, if this
 Church were returning back to the Lord, and to the
 Rule prescribed in his Word, for directing the Church
 how they ought to behave themselves *in the House of*
the living God, which is the Pillar and Ground of the Truth.
 This is the true Notion of Reformation in a backslid-
 den Church, and agreeable to the Scripture-account
 of it: For as, in the Erection of the *Jewish Church*,
 every Thing, whether as to Worship or Government,
 was to be done by God's own Appointment, and *ac-*
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 Reformations, they returned back to this unerring
 Rule, from which they had deviated and turned aside.
 Thus, in the Reformation under the Reign of *Hezeki-*
ah, a Decree was established, *That all Israel should keep*
the Passover to the Lord at Jerusalem; for they had not
done it for a long Time in such Sort as it was written. The
 Levites taught the good Knowledge of the Lord, and made
 Confession to the Lord God of their Fathers: And the
 Priests and the Levites stood in their Place after their
 Manner, according to the Law of Moses the Man of God,
 2 Chron. Chap. 30. And in the Reformation, that
 took place in the Time of *Josiah*, all the Words of the
 Book of the Covenant, which was found in the House of
 the Lord, were read in the Ears of all the People; and
 the King stood in his Place, and made a Covenant before
 the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his Com-
 mandments, and his Testimonies, and his Statutes, with
 all his Heart, and with all his Soul, to perform the Words
 of the Covenant, which were written in the Book of the
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 and to sanctify themselves, and prepare their Brethren,
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But we must needs regrave, That, whatever is y done, there is but little Progress in Reformation, according to the Scriptural Account of it. Is there a *Confession* made unto the Lord God of our Father? Is there a particular *Enumeration* made of the *Steps of Defection* both of Ministers and People, and an *Acknowledgment* of them before the Lord, according to the above Scripture-patterns and Examples, and the laudable Practice of our Fathers in the reforming Periods of this Church? And when we consider the Grounds of that seasonable Duty of *National Fasting*, emitted by the Commission at the Appointment of the last Assembly; they appear to us to be conceived in such general Terms, that they may be applicable to any Period of the Church, bearing no particular Acknowledgment of the *Causes of the Lord's Wrath* gone forth against us at this Day. As for Instance, the sinful *Breach* and *Violation* of our *Covenants*, National and Solemn League is not acknowledged; yea, these Covenants are not so much as mentioned, unless it be in general and dubious Terms. Neither is the least Notice taken of the alarming Mark of God's Anger against this Church, in permitting one of her Seminaries for educating Candidates for the holy Ministry, to be poisoned with *Arminian*, *Socinian*, and *Arian* Errors, and the Guilt that is lying upon the Judicatories of the Church, in the not inflicting an adequate Censure upon the *Broacher* of these *Hereses*. There is no Confession made of the great Sin of the Judicatories in *licensing* so many to preach the Gospel, who seem to be ashamed of Christ and him crucified, and then imposing and violently *obtruding* them on God's Heritage through the Land; by which Means, the Flock of Christ is scattered, wounded, and grievously oppressed. And there is no Acknowledgment of the Sin and Guilt of Judicatories in *invading* the Rights of Christian Congregations, and conferring them upon the *open Enemies* of our Constitution, and of *excommunicating* upon the Matter all the *serious* and *tender* Christians

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rians through the Land, that have not Freedom to submit to the Ministry of these that have been intruded upon them: Nor is there a Confession made of the Sin of lifting up these and other such arbitrary Decisions above the *Examination of the Word*, and suppressing Ministerial Freedom and Faithfulness, and inflicting high Censures upon such as endeavoured to testify against these and other like Defections. Now, these great Steps of Backsliding, and Signs of the Lord's Anger and Controversy with us at this Day, have not so much as been mentioned; and as long as a Church, in the Grounds of their Fasting and Humiliation before the Lord, make only a general Acknowledgment of the grosser Sins that prevail among Churches at all Times, without condescending upon the particular Evils of the Day, however it may pass for Prudence among the Men of this World, yet it can be no Sign of an Advance towards a true and thorow Reformation.

Upon the whole, Since the principal Grounds upon which our *Secession* is laid, still remain, in regard many of the Lord's People, who cannot submit to the Ministry of Intruders, are virtually excommunicated, and Ministers who shall adventure to dispense sealing Ordinances to them are obnoxious to the highest Censures of the Church, according to Act of Assembly 1733 concerning some Ministers in the Presbytery of *Dunfermline*, which Act stands yet unrepealed: And in regard the Acceptance of Presentations is not declared to be contrary to the Principles of this Church; nor is there an effectual Stop put to the Intrusion of any into the Office of the Ministry, contrary to the Will of the Congregation to which they are appointed: And since no Warning is yet emitted against the Errors and blasphemous Heresies vented among us: And since the Act restraining Ministerial Freedom stands unrepealed, and, for any Thing that is yet done, may be looked upon as legal and formal still: And finally, since these and the like Evils are never yet

particularly acknowledged as the just Grounds and Causes of the Lord's Controversy against us; We cannot but be under very great Straits and Difficulties, as Matters thus stand, to accede to the Judicatories of this Church, in a Consistency with the Testimony we have given. And, as these are the Reasons of our continuing still in Secession from the Judicatories of the Church, so, if the following Things were done, our Difficulties would be removed out of the Way, viz.

1mo, That a *seasonable Warning* be emitted against the Infidelity and gross Errors prevailing among us at this Day; and particularly, that the *True*, and *Supreme Deity* of the Son of God our Saviour, his *Independency*, and *Necessary Existence* be expressly asserted, in Opposition to these Terms in which Mr. *Simson* attempted to subvert that important and fundamental Doctrine, as has been found proven against him upon the first Libel, for which he deserved the highest Censure of the Church; and likewise, that the gross and dangerous Errors found proven against him by the Committee in the second Libel, be in plain and express Terms *condemned*. And, in Regard it has been found proven against *William Nimmo*, that he has made a bold and daring Attack upon the whole of Divine Revelation, that the highest Censure of the Church be inflicted upon him: And also, since Mr. *Campbell* at *St. Andrews* has vented some Propositions reflecting both upon natural and revealed Religion, and a Committee of the Commission having entred upon the Consideration of them, the said Affair be proceeded in, and brought to an Issue; and likewise, that an Enquiry be made into the Errors vented by Mr. *Wallace*, in Disparagement of the Principles of reveal'd Religion; and if these gross Errors are found proven against the said Mr. *Campbell*, and Mr. *Wallace*, that the same *high Censure* be inflicted upon them.

2do, That the Act of Assembly 1733, censuring Mr. *Erskine* for impugning the Act 1732 and the arbitrary

bitrary Proceedings of Church-judicatories, and appointing high Censures to be inflicted on the four Brethren for protesting against the said Decision, as suppressing Ministerial Freedom and Faithfulness, be *rescinded*, and all that has followed thereupon be declared *null* and *void* in itself; and that all Ministers of this Church be enjoined to give faithful Warning and Testimony against the prevailing Corruptions of the Times, according to Act of Assembly *August 3. 1648*, intituled, *Act for censuring of Ministers for their Silence, and not speaking to the Corruptions of the Times.*

3^{to}, That the Act of the same Assembly 1733, concerning some Brethren in the Presbytery of *Dunfermline*, be also *rescinded*; and that it be declared, that Ministers shall be allowed to dispense sealing Ordinances to all such as have had Ministers intruded upon them contrary to the Word of God, and the Rules of this Church founded thereupon, and who have not Freedom to submit to the Ministry of such, or to receive the Ordinances of Christ from their Hands, providing they be sufficiently attested as to their Christian Life and Conversation.

4^{to}, In case the Patronage-act shall not be rescinded, that it be declared that the Acceptance of Presentations is contrary to the Principles of this Church; and that Preachers, who accept of the same, be censured, by taking their License from them; and that Ministers for such a Transgression be suspended, and, if they tenaciously adhere to it, that they be deposed. And farther, that it be declared and enacted, That, in all Time coming, no Minister shall be settled in any vacant Congregation, without the Call and Consent of the Majority of that Congregation, who are admitted to full Communion with the Church, in all her sealing Ordinances; and that there be no Preference of Voices in this Matter, upon the Account of any wordly Consideration.

5^{to}, That, in licensing and ordaining Men to the holy Ministry, all Presbyteries be strictly enjoined, not only

only to enquire into their Literature, but also their Acquaintance with the Power of Godliness, and the Work of the *Spirit* upon their own Souls; and that they admit none to Trials, in order to Preaching, but such as are known to be of sound Principles, of a good Report, of a sober, grave, prudent and pious Behaviour, and who have the other Qualifications required in the Scriptures, and in the Acts of the Assemblies of this Church, particularly Act *December* 17. and 18. Assembly 1638, and Act 10. Assembly 1694, and many others. And farther, That an Act be fram'd against the present dangerous Innovation both in the Strain and Method of Preaching, practised by many Ministers and Preachers lately entred into this Church; and that the Contraveners of the said Act be condignly censured.

6to, In regard the just Grounds and Causes of the Lord's Controversy with this Land, have not been particularly acknowledged for many Years past, and the lamentable Steps of Defection and Backsliding, which have lately come to a great Height, have not been confessed, to the Glory of God, by the Commission of the last Assembly, in their Grounds of Fasting; That therefore, in the Grounds of a National Fast, for which there seems to be as weighty Reasons as ever, there be an Acknowledgment of the great Guilt of this Land, in having gone on into such a Course of Backsliding contrary to the Word of God, and the Obligations these Lands are under to promote Reformation, by our Covenants National and Solemn League; and that they make a full and particular Enumeration of the *Steps of Defection* that have been made in our Day, according to the Pattern of Reformation in the Word, and the Example of our Ancestors, in reforming Periods of this Church; particularly in the Years 1638, 1646, and 1648.

If the above Things were done, we might have the comfortable Prospect of a pleasant and desirable Unity and Harmony with our Brethren, in concurring with
them

them, according to our weak Measure, in all other
 necessary Steps towards a further Reformation. And
 may the Lord himself, with whom is the Residue of the
 Spirit, pour out his Spirit from on High upon us every one
 May he turn us again, and cause his Face to shine upon
 us; May he heal all our Backslidings and Breaches
 that Glory may dwell in our Land!

